

**Women Veterans Task Force Committee
Advisory Board
Office of Veterans Affairs**



**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY, & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, & CULTURE AND THE
ARTS**

Rep. Ken Ito, Chair
Rep. James Kunane Tokioka, Vice Chair

DATE: Monday, March 23, 2015

TIME: 10:30 a.m.

PLACE: Conference Room 312

Good morning Chair Ken Ito and Vice Chair James Tokioka, and members of the Committee. I am Carswell Ross, advisor to the Women Veterans Task Force Committee. I **strongly support** HCR45/HR19, which request the establishment and funding for a veterans counselor IV position within the Office of Veterans' Services, to assist all veterans, with a primary focus on female veterans who served on active duty for the full period they were activated.

The Task Force was formed by the Legislature in 2012 to address the needs women veterans in Hawaii. We submitted a report to the 2013 Legislature that detailed preliminary findings concerning our women warriors. We found that military sexual trauma (MST) is rampant in the armed services, that homelessness and joblessness along with PTSD, are some of the major problems that our women face.

We feel there is some urgency to create this position, based on the Committee's research. Last year, in order to assess the scope and type of needs of our women veterans, we performed an informal survey of women veterans throughout the state. Our finding suggest that: (a) women veterans do not know what benefits they have; (b) women veterans did not know that there are services for PTSD, Military Sexual Trauma, access to OB/GYN and breastfeeding among others services; (c) that re-entry services and employment services were available; and (d) women who served are veterans.

The counselor position will provide a focus with which to address the specific needs of women veterans, bridging gaps in care. It will aid with the process of helping the approximately 12,000 women veterans in Hawaii to move forward in their lives. It will help the OVS to collect data, integrate services, educate women veterans on their benefits, assist women veterans in getting access to appropriate health care, assist the task force in outreach efforts and a host of other duties. But, probably most important, the counselor will help the Office of Veterans Services to assess what services are lacking or inadequate.

Hawaii's military women have served our nation often at great cost to their health, their lives and too often to their human dignity. As a state we need to recognize their sacrifice by addressing their needs. This position is the first step in doing that. Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for these Resolutions.

LATE

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

TESTIMONY ON HCR 45/HR 19 REQUESTING THE STATE DEPARTMENT
OF DEFENSE TO ESTABLISH AND FUND A VETERAN WOMEN SERVICES
COORDINATOR POSITION WITHIN THE STATE OFFICE
OF VETERANS SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY, & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, &
CULTURE AND THE ARTS

BY

MR. RONALD P. HAN, JR.
DIRECTOR OF THE STATE OFFICE OF VETERANS SERVICES

March 23, 2015

Chair Ito, Vice Chair Tokioka and Committee Members:

I am Ron Han, Director of the Office of Veterans Services (OVS). I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony in support of the concepts on House Concurrent Resolution 45/House Resolution 19.

Funding for this position was submitted in the division's biennium request but did not receive approval. A House and Senate Bill were introduced to obtain funding through the State Legislature during this session. If funding is not approved through this process, the State Office of Veterans Services will review a third alternative in having an existing Veterans Counselor take on an additional duty and to focus on issues affecting Women Veterans.

The State Office of Veterans Services recognizes the strong need to develop programs and to address critical issues affecting this fastest growing group of veterans.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of Hawaii's Veteran community.

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LATE

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STRONG SUPPORT FOR HCR45/HR19, that requests the establishment and funding for a veterans coordinator (counselor IV) position within the Office of Veterans' Services, to assist all veterans, with a primary focus on female veterans who served on active duty for the full period they were activated.

Aloha Chair Ito and committee members,

I am Ann S. Freed Chair of The Hawaii Military Women's Task Force Committee. We are in strong support of this measure.

The Task Force was formed by the Legislature in 2012 to address the needs women veterans in Hawaii. We submitted a report to the 2013 Legislature that detailed preliminary findings concerning our women warriors. We found that military sexual trauma (MST) is rampant in the armed services that homelessness and joblessness along with PTSD, are some of the major problems that our women face.

The 2013 report included a recommendation to create a Women's Services Coordinator position. Last year HB2072 was introduced to create and fund this position as a "veterans service coordinator" focusing on women. Sadly the bill died in conference as the money committees could not agree on funding for the position.

This year HB881 failed to receive a hearing in WAM and is therefore dead for this year. This resolution will keep the idea alive so that we can address it again next year.

We feel there is some urgency to create this position, based on our research. Last year, in order to assess the scope and type of needs, we did an informal survey of women veterans throughout the state. We found that women don't know what benefits they have, that they need services for PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma, that they need re-entry services and employment services, and that they would like help getting educational benefits. Some of them had questions about eligibility. Some complained of lack of access to OB/GYN and breastfeeding among others services; many of which are provided but the women veterans were unaware.

Our results match those of two more extensive surveys by Disabled American Veterans and CalVet. All of the surveys demonstrated a need for continuous education about benefits and constant outreach.

The coordinator/counselor will provide a focus with which to address the specific needs of women veterans, bridging gaps in care. It will aid with the process of helping the approximately 12,000 women veterans in Hawaii to move forward in their lives. It will help the OVS to collect data, integrate services, educate women veterans on their benefits, assist women veterans in getting access to appropriate health care, assist the task force in outreach efforts and a host of other duties. But, probably most important, the counselor will help the Office of Veterans Services to assess what services are lacking or inadequate.

Hawaii's military women have served our nation often at great cost to their health, their lives and too often to their human dignity. As a state we need to recognize their sacrifice by addressing their needs. This position is the first step in doing that.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify

Ann S. Freed

Chair, Women's Military Task Force Committee

Office of Veteran's Services

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